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LOW LIFE AND OTHER PLAYS

BY MAZO DE LA ROCHE

Explorers of the Dawn
Possession
Delight
Jalna
Low Life and other Plays

LOW LIFE

AND OTHER PLAYS

 $\begin{array}{c} & \text{BY} \\ \text{MAZO DE LA ROCHE} \end{array}$



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Сору 3

To

MRS. JAMES WARNOCK

who, safe in her pleasant niche in High Life, is ever ready with gentle sympathy for those in Low Life



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LOW LIFE

CHARACTERS

MRS. BENN, a charwoman
BENN, her husband
LINTON, their nonpaying guest

"Low Life" was first acted in Trinity Memorial Hall, Montreal, on May 14, 1925, by the Trinity Players, with the following cast:—

LINTON.... Mr. Basil Donn

BENN.... Mr. Charles Robinson

Mrs. BENN... Mrs. Basil Donn

It was staged under the direction of Mr. W. A.

Tremayne

SCENE

A poor room at the top of a lodging house in a city in eastern Canada. The time is late afternoon on a foggy day in spring, but the light coming in at the one window is sufficient for the two men who sit at a table in centre playing at cribbage. At the back of the room is a cupboard, a small stove, and a door leading into the passage. At the left, a door leading into a bedroom. At the right, under the window, a tumbled cot bed.

The men are intent upon their game. Benn, plump, common, good-natured, in shirt and trousers and stockinged feet; Linton, tall, shabby, with an air approaching gentility. He has the self-conscious melancholy of the fallen gentleman, but he really had not very far to fall.

LINTON. — Two for a pair (pegs). Benn. — Six for three pairs (pegs).

LINTON. — Ha! I suppose you think you'll peg out.

BENN (excitedly).—Pl'y!

LINTON. — Twenty-eight.

Benn. — Thirty-one! Gime! And look at me 'and. (Spreads out his cards.) Never needed to count it. Double run of four, five, six.

LINTON (stretching). — I have no luck.

BENN. — Unlucky at cards, lucky in love.

LINTON (darkly). — Love! Women have been my undoing. What I've suffered on their account! Thank God, I never married.

Benn (humorously). — Well, you can thank God I did.

LINTON (stretching). — Ho, hum! A long day.

BENN. — Did you ever see the like for the time of year? I've been in this country twenty years and I've never seen such a spring. The climate's gettin' worse all the time. July, August, and winter. Them's our seasons. These 'ere immigrants from the 'Ebrides, I wonder wot they'll think of it. They'll find this's a worse place than the

one they come from. Might as well be back in the 'Ebrides, I'd s'y. Wot I want to know

- is, w'y does the Government bring 'em out? Wot are they goin' to do with them? There's enough 'ere now.
- LINTON. We need them on the land. (He stretches again and rises.) Lord, how stiff I am! A night like last night gets into one's bones. That bench felt pretty hard towards morning. I could n't help thinking of you so snug and comfortable here.
- BENN (anxiously).—Now that you're up, just 'ave a look at the clock. It must be nearly time for the missus.
- (LINTON draws aside the dingy curtain and peers, with head on one side, out of the window.)
- LINTON. It's so foggy I can't see the face of the clock. The tower's almost hidden by it. Lord, what a night!
- BENN (uneasily). Oh, I don't think it's going to be too bad. It's not cold.
- LINTON (shivering).—But the fog. That's what chokes you like cotton wool. (He returns to his seat by the table and puffs gloomily at his pipe.)
- BENN. Well, even if we can't see the clock

- we'll 'ear the whistles blow for six. It'll be time enough then.
- LINTON (*mildly*). Where's she working to-day?
- BENN (musing). It's Thursday. H'm. Her reg'lar d'y at Mrs. Horning's, Argyle Road. Not so far off neither. It'll not tike 'er long.
- LINTON (placidly). Yes, but she's got to go to the day nursery for the kid.
- BENN. Yes, she's got to go to the nursery. I believe the fog's lifting. Try if you can see the clock now.
- (LINTON obediently goes to the window, draws back the curtain and cranes his neck as before.)
- LINTON. Not a whit better. I can just make out the tower itself. There's no sign of the face of the clock.
- Benn (rising with a look of desperation).—
 Well, I know it's getting on for five. But,
 look 'ere, you've got to 'ave something to
 eat before you go.
- LINTON (with a pretense at lightness).—Oh, don't mind about me.

- BENN (angrily). Mind about you! I'd like to know where you'd a been if I 'adn't minded about you!
 - (LINTON, who has been writing on the fogged pane, now returns to the table, leaving the bit of curtain looped back on the string that supports it. With an apologetic look at Benn he drops into his chair and shades his face with his hand. Benn anxiously investigates the cupboard and extracts a cold potato, a piece of bread, and two cold sausages. He places these on a plate, arranging them in an effort to make them appear as a hearty meal. LINTON watches him eagerly between his fingers.)
- Benn (setting the plate on the table before Linton).—It's not much, but it'll stay you.
- LINTON (falling to). Thanks. I don't suppose there's a drop in the bottle.
- BENN.—Oh, I forgot. (He hesitates and then adds, uncomfortably.) There is a drop in the bottle, but she said this morning that she 'ad a mind to mix 'erself a good 'ot toddy to-night and see if it would drive the cold out of 'er.

- LINTON.—I'm glad she's going to do that.

 She does n't half take care of herself. It would be a very bad thing if she got down sick.
- BENN. Pretty bad for us, eh?
- (They look at each other and laugh rather shamefacedly.)
- LINTON (attacking the last sausage). She's a fine woman I say it even if she was a bit rough on me last night. She's a wonderful woman.
- BENN. She's a great worker. W'y, when that last biby come, 'ow long do you suppose she laid off? One week. Just seven d'ys, and she was up and at it again. She only let one week's charing collect on 'er.
- LINTON (wiping his lips).—She's a marvel.

 I suppose she soon caught up with that too.
- BENN. Oh, yes, she's never let nothink collect on 'er for long.
- LINTON.—I wonder if I could have a cup of tea. It would warm me up so I'd not feel the cold so much in the park to-night.
- Benn (contritely). Tea! Of course you can.

- The kettle's just on the boil. Just 'ave a squint at the clock again while I stew it.
- (LINTON goes to the window and peers out.

 Benn pours hot water on the tea. His expression suggests both pity for LINTON and anxiety for his departure.)
- LINTON. You could cut it with a knife. The lights are on now. You never saw such a blurry-looking mess of a night. An awful night to—
- BENN.—'Ere's your tea.
- (He hands him the cup, and while LINTON drinks he goes himself to the window and looks out.)
- LINTON (sardonically). Well, what do you make of it?
- BENN. It ain't inviting, but—I've seen worse.

 Anyw'y, you know wot she said last night.

 And after you'd put your coat on and gone out she kept at it for an hour or more in bed.
- (A whistle sounds hoarsely in the distance through the heavy air. Both men start like criminals. Linton gulps the last of his tea and sets the cup down with a shaking hand.

 Benn immediately snatches it up, also

snatches up a tea towel, wipes frantically the cup and the plate, and thrusts them into the cupboard. Meanwhile LINTON is getting into a very shabby overcoat and tweed cap, in which he looks the picture of downat-heel gentility. A door slams below. Both men stand listening while heavy steps begin slowly to ascend far-below stairs.)

- BENN.—It's 'er, as sure as death. For God's sake, Mr. Linton, get out of 'ere!
- LINTON. How can I? She'll meet me on the stairs.
- BENN (hysterically.) Get out, I s'y. 'Ide in the passage. It's dark. Flatten yourself against the wall. She's at the second flight now!
- (He pushes LINTON into the passage, softly shuts the door on him, and stands listening, with beating heart. The steps draw nearer; they pause for a moment outside the door, then it opens, and MRS. BENN, her baby on one arm, the other laden with packages, appears. She is a strong-looking woman, but her broad face is pale and tired. She is not very dirty, considering that she has been charing

all day long. She throws her husband a half-contemptuous, half-motherly look as she marches past him to the table and begins to lay her packages thereon.)

BENN (deprecatingly). — You're a bit early, eh?

Mrs. Benn (cryptically).—I'd need to be, after the d'y's work I done.

BENN (brightly). — 'Ow's biby?

Mrs. Benn.—Nurse said 'e was a bit peevish this morning. I expect 'is rash was botherin' 'im, but 'e was all laughin' and crowin' when I went in. Nurse says there ain't a finer kiddie in the nursery.

(BENN comes and peers down at the bundle on her arm.)

Benn.—Hullo! Daddy's boy! Hullo, 'Ector! Mrs. Benn.—Stop your fooling. I want 'im to go asleep. 'E was all but off when I came in.

Benn (poking at the baby).—Hullo, 'Ector!

Mrs. Benn. — Nip around now and begin to l'y the tible while I put biby on the bed. There's brawn in that flat package, and there's a lettuce and some Chelsea buns.

- (She goes into the other room. A door slams below. Benn goes to the window and looks down into the street. He gives his head a doleful shake and then returns to the table and begins to untie the packages. He abstracts a slice of brawn from one, two biscuits from another, and breaks off a piece of cheese. These he drops into the pocket of his coat.)
- MRS. BENN (reappearing).—Well, you are slow. 'Ere, let me. (She espies the teapot standing on the teakettle). Tea! What 'ave you been mikin' tea for?
- BENN (eagerly). For you, m' dear. I thought as 'ow a cup of tea would go good after the chill and the fog. I thought I'd 'ave it all ready for you the minute you'd pop in.
- MRS. BENN.—Listen to Mr. Beau Brummel!
 Well, I never! Do you think I can 'ave you wistin' tea like that? 'Owever, since it's mide—
- (She pours herself a cup and stands by the stove drinking it, while Benn pushes the packages to one end of the table, places a scrap of

- tablecloth on the other end, and lays two places.)
- Mrs. Benn. Why are n't you l'yin' a plice for Gladys? Why ain't she 'ome at this hour?
- BENN. Teacher came and fetched her to practise for the M'ypole dance. Took her off in 'er own car, if you please.
- Mrs. Benn (aghast).—Lord! Don't tell me teacher come up 'ere in this untidy 'ole?
- BENN. Oh, no. She wited in the street below.
- Mrs. Benn (smiling broadly).—It wouldn't look swell nor nothink to see a car witin' for our Gladys.
- BENN. Rather not. And the Simpkinses saw, and the Clapps, and the Ryders. 'Arf the street was at their doors.
- Mrs. Benn. And did Gladys put on her clean frock?
- BENN.—I put it on 'er. Buttoned it up myself, and while she tied up 'er 'air ribbon I put on my collar and tie, got my 'at and walking stick, and escorted 'er down to 'er car for all the world like a little lidy. Lizzie, it would 'ave brung the tears to your eyes to 'ave seen 'er sittin' there beside Miss

Philips as chipper as the Queen of Sheba. (Mrs. Benn is deeply moved by the vision thus conjured up. In a sort of golden haze she gets the bread and adds another spoonful of tea to the pot, and lights the oil lamp.)

Mrs. Benn. — She's a wonderful little kid if I do s'y it. Dances like a fairy.

BENN (gallantly).—She's got a wonderful mother and I don't care who 'ears me s'y it.

MRS. BENN.—Silly! (She feels in her pocket and produces a nice large orange.) 'Ere's a orange Mrs. Horning gave me for 'er. I'll put it where she'll see it first thing when she comes 'ome. (She lays the orange on the window sill. At the same instant she sees LINTON's name scrawled on the foggy pane.) Wot's that mean? That nime on the pine! 'E's been 'ere again. Did n't I tell you? Did n't I tell 'im? What do you think I'm made of? Putty? When was he 'ere?

BENN.—Lizzie, Lizzie, don't tike on so. 'E just stepped in for a minute to get 'is 'andkercher. 'E'd forgot it last night when you sent 'im off. 'E didn't stay but a minute. While I 'unted up the 'andkercher—I'd

used it to wipe off the stove by mistike—'e stood there by the window and wrote 'is nime on the pine—just for somethink to do, like.

MRS. BENN (snorting). — That's about all the effort 'e's got the ambition for — to write 'is nime. I like 'is cheek. On my winder, too. (She savagely wipes the pane clean with a corner of her apron and straightens the curtain.) Well, 'e can write 'is nime on a bench in the park to-night for all I care. We're shut of 'im.

Benn (musingly). — It's a good nime, too, Linton. None of your little, cheap nimes — Mrs. Benn (scornfully). — Like Benn.

BENN. — Yes, like Benn. I knew as soon as I met 'im that first day last September — we was both applying for the sime job, I mind — I knew 'e was a gentleman. Or somewhere near it.

MRS. BENN (seating herself at the table).—
Well, 'e'll not sponge on me no more. Not
if I know it. It's bad enough to 'ave one
man to keep, and 'im fit for nothink much
but to be a father.

- BENN (reproachfully).—Lizzie, we've only two kids.
- MRS. BENN. What about the three that didn't live in between times, what with me wearin' myself out with charin' and all?
- BENN (also seating himself and looking very small).—Oh, well, accidents will 'appen in the best-regulited families.
- Mrs. Benn. Accidents? Accidents? I call them calamerties.
- (They eat in gloomy silence for a space except that MRS. BENN ejaculates once, "Writin' is nime on my winderpine! I like 'is cheek!" Then the warmth of the room, the pleasant lamplight, the good meal, have their effect; the atmosphere becomes more mellow.)
- Mrs. Benn. Wot about the Igency? Were you over there to-day?
- BENN (his mouth very full).—Yes. Nothink there.
- Mrs. Benn.—And wot about the plice as chauffer? Did you try there? (Benn, his mouth too full for speech, nods.)
- Mrs. Benn. Well, wot about it?

- BENN (gulping down his mouthful).—The lidy thought I wouldn't do. She wanted someone who'd show off a smart livery. She thought I'd a kind of downtrodden air.
- Mrs. Benn (angrily).—Oh, the very ideer! I like 'er cheek. I'd downtrod 'er if I 'ad 'er 'ere! I don't know a man that 'd set off a 'andsome livery better than you.
- BENN (swelling his chest).—I reely think I could.
- Mrs. Benn. Did you answer that ad for sandwich man?
- BENN (patiently). Yes. They thought I was too plump to make a proper sandwich. They thought I'd 'old the boards out at such a angle that folk 'd get a wrong perspective.
- Mrs. Benn. Well, I'm glad I don't 'ave to be a blooming sylph nor a screaming beauty to 'old my job. (She turns sidewise in her chair and ruefully rubs her knees.) My knees feels like two jellyfish to-night from goin' over Mrs. Horning's floors three times. This was one of 'er particular days. If

- you'd a ever 'eard 'er fussin' over the washin'! Afraid 'er pink undies'd run! I'd mike 'em run, and her in them!
- (They grin at each other appreciatively. Then their grins fade as they hear steps slowly ascending the stairs. The step is only too familiar to them.)
- Mrs. Benn (throwing up her head). It's Linton. It's 'is step.
- BENN.—It is n't. It can't be. It's that new lodger in the back room. (But he knows it is LINTON.)
- MRS. BENN. You can't fool me. 'E must be crizy. I'll teach 'im. I'll I'y 'ands on 'im, I will!
- BENN.—'E must be drunk. Let me go out and stop 'im.
- (He goes toward the door, but she catches his arm and drags him back. Together they stand, as the steps cease and a hollow knock sounds on the panel.)
- Mrs. Benn (with dangerous politeness).—
 Come in.
- (The door slowly opens and LINTON appears. He has a haggard look. He carries his cab

in his hand. Benn makes a warning gesture, but Linton's eyes are on Mrs. Benn.)

LINTON (imploringly). — Mrs. Benn. I—I—Mrs. Benn (extending her arm threateningly).

— Now you go. I tell you, I'm dingerous. It'll take more than Benn 'ere to 'old me if I turn on you. Wot do you think I am? A slive to work my fingers to the bone and my knees to jelly to feed the likes o' you?

- LINTON. Mrs. Benn. I—I— (He advances a step.)
- Mrs. Benn (savagely). You won't go, eh? Let me at 'im!
- (BENN clutches her and holds her, but hard work has made her stronger than he. She tears herself away and snatches up the poker.)
- BENN. For pity's sake, go, Mr. Linton! We don't want the perlice up 'ere.
- LINTON. You're a kind woman, Mrs. Benn.
- Mrs. Benn (with a flourish of the poker).—
 I'm not a kind woman! I'm a 'ard woman.
 I've felt it comin' on me for weeks—gettin' 'arder and 'arder. Now I'm as 'ard as n'ils. So, get out! Mike 'iste!

BENN. - Lizzie! Lizzie!

Mrs. Benn.—'Old your tongue. It was you that brung 'im' ere. Eight long months ago.

LINTON. — You were a kind woman then, Mrs. Benn.

- Mrs. Benn.—I was a softy. The sime as Joe, 'ere. But I'm not a softy any longer. Why, look 'ere. I want to tell you somethink I did. Yesterd'y, when I was cleanin' in a cellar, I took a bit of charcoal and I figured out on the wall 'ow many meals I'd give you. Eight months—thirty d'ys a month—two 'undred and forty d'ys. Three meals a d'y equals seven 'undred and twenty times 'ave you drawn your chair up to my board. Think of it! Seven 'undred and twenty times you've 'ad the run of your teeth at my tible!
- LINTON. You're forgetting the time I was in hospital three weeks, Mrs. Benn, and how weak I was afterward. I only ate enough to keep a child for another month.
- Mrs. Benn. Enough to keep a child! That's just it. It was enough to 'ave kept my child.

- BENN.—You forget, Lizzie, 'ow 'e 's tried to get work, sime as I 'ave. There's been other fine men besides us out of work this winter and spring.
- Mrs. Benn. That's not to s'y I 'ave to keep 'em all, is it?
- BENN. But it's not as though 'e 'ad n't tried, Lizzie, sime as me.
- Mrs. Benn. Well, let 'im go to a instituotion. I ain't goin' to 'ave my 'ouse turned into a instituotion for dec'yed gentlemen. Let 'im marry a wife to keep 'im, sime as you. Let 'im marry two. It'd tike two to keep 'im the w'y 'e 'd like to be kept, with his collars and ties and shiving soap and all.
- LINTON. Mrs. Benn, why did you not tell me that my collar and tie offended you? I would have left them off and let my beard grow if it would have pleased you. But you misunderstand me. I did n't come back here to-night to ask you to take me in again, but simply to thank you for all you have done for me—last night you were too much upset to take things rationally. I wanted, also, to ask you for a few old newspapers.

Mr. McFee, at the corner, is letting me sleep in his empty garage, but the cement floor seems pretty cool and damp. I thought if you had a few old newspapers, or maybe a bit of worn-out quilt—

BENN.—Think of that, Lizzie. A cold, damp floor after a good warm bed like that. (He points to the cot bed in the corner with an imploring gesture.)

MRS. BENN (fiercely).—Yes, think of it!

That's your daughter's bed. Gladys's bed!

And she's never been able to sleep in it for eight months because of 'im. She said to me this mornin', "Oh, Mother, it did feel good to 'ave my own bed again instead of sleepin' acrost the foot wiv you and Daddy!" It's no w'y for 'er to do—a clever little girl like Gladys that the teacher calls for in 'er own motor car. (She looks defiantly at the men, but her fierceness has departed. She lays down the poker and goes toward the bedroom.) I'll let you 'ave a quilt off our bed. We can do without it now the nights are milder.

(She goes into the bedroom. The men, left alone,

look at each other sheepishly, then, Benn's gaze wandering, he sees the orange on the window sill, snatches it up, and offers it to LINTON. LINTON sadly shakes his head, but mechanically drops the orange into his pocket. He also deprecatingly accepts the slice of brawn, the biscuits, and bit of cheese which Benn stole from Mrs. Benn's packages, and puts them in his other pocket. He then sits down, and buries his face in his bands. Mrs. Benn returns, carrying an old quilt and some newspapers.)

MRS. BENN (with a kind of savage cheerfulness).—'Ere we are! 'Ere's the very thing. Now look. You must spread a layer of these newspipers down first. There's nothink better to keep the cold and damp out. 'Old up yer 'ead and tike a little interest in wot I'm tellin' you. Just pretend I'm a demonstritor in a shop window and your nose glued to the pine.

(LINTON uncovers his face and gazes meekly at the newspapers laid on the floor.)

LINTON.—Ah, yes, I see. I'm to spread the papers on the floor to keep in the damp and cold.

Mrs. Benn. — Nonsense. To keep the damp and cold out. Out, not in.

LINTON. — Oh, yes. Out, not in.

BENN. - The question is, will they do it?

- MRS. BENN.—O' course they'll do it. Arctic explorers uses piper to keep out the cold. There ain't nothink better.
- LINTON. Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't give them to me, Mrs. Benn, if they were n't nice and warm.
- MRS. BENN (hurriedly).—Now, you spread down the quilt, doubled so, then you l'ys yourself on the under 'arf, and draws the hupper 'arf over you, see?
- LINTON (leaning forward). Just how was that, Mrs. Benn? I don't seem to grasp your meaning.
- Mrs. Benn.—Lord! The man's no more fit to look after 'isself than a biby. (She proceeds with exasperation.) You see them newspipers, don't yer?
- LINTON. Yes, Mrs. Benn.
- Mrs. Benn. Very well. L'y them down first. Then the quilt folded so, then yourself in between.

- LINTON (anxiously). You mean I'm to get in between the newspapers and the quilt.
- Mrs. Benn. No, no, no. Now look. (Linton drops to his knees on the floor beside the quilt.) You are to get in between the two layers of quilt.
- LINTON. Ah, I see. But, then, what are the newspapers for?
- Mrs. Benn (on a deadly note). To keep the cold and damp out.
- (Benn has lighted his pipe while watching the proceedings. Now, between puffs, he speaks.)
- BENN.—To be sure. There's nothink much colder and damper than a cement floor. You'd get your death sleepin' on it if you didn't 'ave them nice warm noospipers under yer. And we'd feel responsible for your death, and we'd never enjoy another peaceful night's sleep because your spirit would 'aunt us.
- Mrs. Benn.—Oh, 'e 'd 'aunt us, I expect!
- (She sits on her heels with a worried look. LIN-TON now arranges himself on half the quilt and draws the other half over him with a deprecating gesture.)

- LINTON. Is this the way?
- BENN. Yes, yes, that's the w'y, Mr. Linton.

 And you could curl the end of the quilt under your 'ead for a pillow. (He arranges it for LINTON.)
- LINTON (closing his eyes). How comfortable! How warm!
- MRS. BENN (brightly).—Don't you think you'd better tike up your bed and walk now?
- (LINTON stretches out a trembling hand and clutches the hem of MRS. BENN'S apron.)
- LINTON. Oh, Mrs. Benn, don't send me away from you, and Joe, and Gladys! I ask nothing but to sleep here where I am on the floor, under the same roof with you. Let Gladys have her bed undisturbed. As I've said often before, when I am in a position to repay all your kindness I will repay it a hundredfold. And that time will come soon, I'm sure.
- BENN.—Once the spring properly opens up, 'e'll'ave a chance. (Looks down at Linton hopefully.)
- LINTON. Why, only on Tuesday last a man

from whom I was asking employment said to me, "Don't you worry, sir"—

Benn. — Called 'im "sir," you 'll notice, Lizzie.

LINTON (still on the flat of his back).—He said, "Don't you worry, sir, a man of your fine presence, a man of your commanding figure"—

Mrs. Benn. — Yes, you do look a commandin' figger, don't yer?

LINTON.—"A man of your dominant glance need entertain no fears—your day will come. The day when you will be appreciated."

Mrs. Benn. — W'y did n't 'e tike yer on hisself then?

LINTON.—He was the owner of a prosperous peanut stand and he wanted an assistant, but he feared that I would lend such an air of dignity to the stand that the urchins would be afraid to present their coppers.

Mrs. Benn. — Well, I never!

BENN. — But it's true, Lizzie, it's true. W'y, talk about dignity, he even lends dignity to this little 'ome of ours. When he tikes Gladys for a walk, there's an eye at every

window, and all the mothers on the street are envious to see our child led along by a gentleman like 'im. I expect they think he is her tooter.

MRS. BENN. — Ha!

(LINTON rises to his knees. He and she face each other, eye to eye, in silence for a space.)

BENN.—And not only that, Lizzie. When teacher come for Gladys to-day, she says to me, says she, "Mr. Benn, wotever has come over Gladys? She's so much more refined than she was. You'll pardon me s'yin' so, I 'ope, but she used to be as wild and rough a child as there was in the school."

Mrs. Benn. — She dared say that! I won't say a thing to 'er! I won't tell 'er where she gets off nor nothink!

BENN (excitedly). — But wait, Lizzie. Teacher says then, "She's a perfeck little lidy, she is now, so mannerly, and so refined, there must have been some strong influence at work."

MRS. BENN. — Well, 'is hinfluence is the only part of 'im that will work, then. (But she is immensely pleased.)

BENN.—A strong influence at work, she said. (LINTON rises from his knees and stands draped against the door frame, wearing a somewhat remote, aloof expression.)

BENN. — Teacher said, "You 'ave reason to be proud of your daughter, Mr. Benn. She has the manners of a patrician. I can't teach 'er nothink."

MRS. BENN (astounded). — She said that about our Gladys?

BENN. — About our Gladys.

LINTON (mildly). — I did what I could.

BENN.—And you should have 'eard 'im, Lizzie, when I was a tying of Gladys's 'air ribbon. 'E 'd just stepped in for 'is overcoat. "Now," 'e says, "mind your manners, you young limb. None o' your coarse Canadian w'ys of speakin'. S'y 'Yes, teacher,' prettily, not 'yeh' or 'huh-huh.' And 'teacher,' mind, with the last syllable nicely clipped, not 'teachur,' or you'll never grow up to marry a gentleman." Lizzie, we've got to think of Gladys's future, 'aven't we? "A refined influence at work," says teacher.

(An atmosphere of warmth, of hospitality steals through the little room. It is made visible in the new case of the men's attitudes, in the softening of Mrs. Benn's aspect. She bends and slowly rolls up the quilt, and carries it to the next room. Returning, she goes to the cupboard, takes out an extra plate, cup, and knife, lays them on the table, takes more brawn from the package, places it on the platter, and draws up another chair.)

MRS. BENN. - Sit in, men.

(They come forward with alacrity, but LINTON does not sit down till he has assisted Mrs.

Benn to her seat with the utmost gallantry.

She blossoms into smiles.)

Mrs. Benn. — Did you get chilled in the fog? LINTON (seating himself). — Oh, not badly.

Mrs. Benn. — There's a mouthful in the bottle,
Joe. Give it to 'im before'e goes to bed.
I'll not need it.

BENN. - 'Ave some brawn, Mr. Linton.

LINTON. — Very little.

Mrs. Benn.—'Ave some cheese. It's nice and nippy.

- LINTON. Oh, I dare say my appetite will come back to me.
- (A door slams below. Small feet begin stamping up the stairs.)
- A CHILD'S VOICE (below). Mother!
- BENN. It's Gladys, back from the practice.
- (Mrs. Benn springs to the door and opens it.)
- CHILD'S VOICE. Hold the lamp, Mother. It's awful dark.
- (LINTON turns in his chair with a look of pain.)
- LINTON (loudly).—Not "awful," Gladys, "awfully"—or "exceedingly," my dear.
- (Mrs. Benn takes up the lamp and goes into the passage, holding it high and smiling expectantly. The two men also rise. Benn takes the orange from Linton's pocket and holds it toward the door.)
- Mrs. Benn. Ah, she looks a pictur', bless 'er 'eart.
- BENN.—And 'ere's 'er horange, all ready for 'er!

CURTAIN



COME TRUE

CHARACTERS

in the order in which they appear

SPITTAL

LEAF

WADDIE

Mr. Beswetherick

Syd, an attendant

THE MATRON

Lucy Meadows, an inmate of the Old Women's Home

Inmates of the Old Men's Home "Come True" was first acted in Hart House Theatre on May 16, 1927, with the following cast:—

Spittal Leaf	Inmates of the	Martin Cleworth Leslie Floyd
WADDIE	Old Men's	Brendan Mulholland
Mr. Beswetherick	Home	W. Ward Price
Syd, an attendant		H. M. Newton
THE MATRON		Ada S. Cleworth
Lucy Meadows, an	inmate of	the
Old Women's H	Home	Margaret Tytler

SCENE

A small day ward in the men's section of an Old People's Home. At the back of the stage there is a large window through which a blue spring sky is seen. There are doors, right and left, and under the window four chairs are ranged, the chair nearest the door on left being a wheel chair. In it is seated Spittal, a robust old man of over eighty, with a red face, upstanding thick gray hair, and staring blue eyes. He wears a clumsy gray suit, an untidily folded red neckerchief, and a distinctly truculent expression.

The room is bare and unhomelike, and has no color, except for the patch of blue sky discovered by the window.

SPITTAL (glaring about).—I won't do it! (He continues to stare truculently into space, his hands twitching on the arms of his chair. Then, blazing again into righteous

indignation, he strikes the arm of his chair three sharp blows with his fist to emphasize his asseverations.) I won't (bang!) and I won't (bang!) and I won't (bang!) and I won't (terrific bang!). (He thrusts his head forward with a jerk and introduces a really ferocious snarl into his voice.) Tyrangs! That's what they are! Does anybody here say they ain't tyrangs? (He glares still more fiercely about the empty room.) Very well, then, don't say so!

(The light tapping of two sticks is heard, then a second old man enters in a kind of toddling walk. He is a little wisp of a man, gentle and deprecating, no more aggressive than his name, which is LEAF. He sits down on the chair second from Spittal.)

Spittal (craning his neck toward him).—Do you say as they're not tyrangs. Do yer?

LEAF (in a thin voice).—Oh, no, Spittal. I don't deny they're tyrants. (Lowering his voice.) Especially him. If you don't want to wash, that's your own affair, I'd say. It would n't offend me if you never was to wash.

- SPITTAL (glaring at him).—I'd like to see yer offended. Offended with me, by gum!
- LEAF. Well, I'm sure I'm not offended. I'm not offended with anyone.
- Spittal (pouncing). What? Not offended with him? Arter the way he's used me this morning?
- LEAF (trembling).—Well, Spittal, I have to think of my stomach, and it won't stand going without food. I must have my food regular.
- SPITTAL. Food! Don't talk about food to me! LFAF (mildly). The porridge was burnt.

SPITTAL. — Hr-r.

- LEAF.—But the bread was nice and fresh, and the drippings was very tasty.
- (SPITTAL draws the back of his hand across his mouth and groans. Leaf, regarding him timidly, extracts a small chunk of bread from his pocket and proffers it with a trembling hand, as one might offer a morsel to a caged lion.)
- LEAF. Just a bite saved from my own breakfast to stay you.
- (SPITTAL glares at the bread, but takes it and absently bites off half.)

Spittal (bis mouth very full.) — Tyrangs! That's what they are. Tyrangs!

LEAF.—Sh. There's someone coming. (He peers into the passage.) Oh, it's just Waddie and Mr. Beswetherick.

(The two named enter. WADDIE is a thickset, good-looking man of sixty-five, the youngest of the quartette. He is wholesome and able-bodied, except for one foot, which is wrapped up in dark bandages. He leans beavily on a stick. Mr. Beswetherick is decidedly above the others socially, being quite genteel in his ways. He is about seventy-five, but well preserved and erect, wearing decent black clothes and a nicely trimmed whisker which gives him the air of a preacher. His voice is pompous and his enunciation careful, but he occasionally drops an aitch. He seats himself on the chair farthest from SPITTAL, while WADDIE limbs energetically to the one between Spittal and Leaf. They are now sitting in a row facing the audience. WADDIE takes out his tobacco bouch and pipe and begins to fill the latter.)

- WADDIE (solemnly).—A lovely morning. A lovely May morning, friends.
- SPITTAL. Not the sort of morning a man wants to be tyrannized over, neither.
- Mr. Beswetherick.—I think you make a mistake, Henry Spittal, in refusing to wash.

 All nature looks washed and clean on such a morning as this. Why should man alone be vile?
- SPITTAL (outraged).—Vile! Who calls me vile? (He stuffs the rest of the bread into his mouth and glares across at Mr. Beswetherick.)
- Mr. Beswetherick (raising one hand).—Calm yourself, Spittal. I do not mean vile as to mind, as to soul, but as to 'abits. You refuse to have your hair combed, to be washed. You're dirty and you're helpless. That's vile. Quite unlike nature, which readily accommodates herself to the exigency of present environment.
- (SPITTAL almost chokes in an effort to speak, but his mouth is full of bread, and Mr. Be swetherick's resonant voice and splendid words have further rendered him speechless.)

- LEAF. Put as could n't be better, Mr. Beswetherick. You could n't find anything cleaner than nature, or anything dirtier than man when he goes against nature.
- MR. Beswetherick (sententiously). Which is indisputable. And therefore a paradox.
- Waddle. Well, I have got no education in particular, so I can't hold my own in an argument with the like of you, but I do think that Syd has no right to refuse to let him go in to breakfast just because he won't wash. I think we ought to speak to Matron about it. He's the oldest one here, and it's our place to see that he ain't bullied by any o' the attendants.
- LEAF (reproachfully).—Why, Joe, he ain't older than me! I'll be eighty-six come Michaelmas, and he ain't but eighty-four.
- WADDIE. True. But you're as spry as the best of us, and he can't help hisself at all.

 I'll speak to Matron myself.
- Mr. Beswetherick (darkly).—I never interfere in the ways of matrons or nature. They're both of feminine origins, and interference only aggravates the symptoms.

(No one answers. Mr. Beswetherick clasps his hands on his stomach, Waddie placidly puffs at his pipe, and old Leaf sits with a hand on each of his sticks as if ready at any moment to toddle off somewhere or nowhere. Spittal is still manipulating the hard crust in his poor old gums, his eyes bulging with the effort. They bulge still more as he hears sharp, light footsteps approaching, but, try as he will, he cannot swallow. Now Syd, an attendant, enters—a hard-faced, active young man, in his shirt sleeves, with an apron pinned before him and a corn broom in his hand.)

Mr. Beswetherick. — A lovely May morning, Syd.

Syd. — Lovely enough for them as 'as nothing to do but sit and enjoy it.

Waddie. — You don't expect us to do the work, do you, Syd?

SYD. — W'y not?

WADDIE. — Well, in the first place we're not able. Then, this is n't a free ward. We're all of us paying in a little for our keep.

Syd.—Your relatives paying, you mean! A

- little! You bet it's little. (He has begun to sweep violently.)
- WADDIE. Why didn't you get that sweeping done while we were in at breakfast?
- MR. BESWETHERICK. Most disagreeable to the olfactory nerves, which on a May morning like this are doubly sensitive to the exigencies of nature.
- (But SYD does not hear them. He is staring into Spittal's face.)
- Syp. Eating, eh? Eating, are yer? Now, wot I want to know is who brung you sumpin' ter eat?
- Spittal (swallowing at last). Take yer spying face away! I was n't eating.
- Syp. You lie. There's crumbs all over your waistcoat! Don't you all know it's against the rules ter carry food from the table? One o' you 'as broke the rules. We'll see what Matron 'as to say to that! We'll see, you pack of rule-breaking, complaining, sniveling old gaffers! We'll see.
- (The old men quail visibly before his threatening stare, especially LEAF, who trembles so that his sticks tap the floor in a kind of feeble

- dance. Syd, broom in hand, marches to MR. Beswetherick and pokes him in the chest with a sharp forefinger.)
- Syp. Did you pinch food off the table, eh?
- Mr. Beswetherick (hastily).—No, no, indeed—no, Syd. I am bound as a gentleman to respect the rules of the institution where I am, in the interim, domiciled.
- Syd (scornfully passing on).—Huh! Would n't trust yer if yer 'ad a chance ter fill yer pockets up wiv plum puddin'.
- (Mr. Beswetherick raises his head, deeply offended, but says nothing.)
- SYD (tapping old LEAF in his turn). And you!

 I'll bet it weren't you. Yer 'aven't the guts ter steal fer another, 'ave yer, now?
- LEAF (shaking terribly).—No—no—I'm timid by nature. I—only—
- WADDIE (taking his pipe from his mouth).—
 Come now, Syd. Keep your hair on. I
 brought Spittal the bread, and if you want
 to go and squeal to Matron, why do, and be
 damned.
- Syp.—Ow, you'd swear at me, would yer?
 We'll see wot 'appens to them as steal food,

and then swear at an officer of the Instituotion.

- Waddie (scornfully). Officer! Slavey! Come now, my boy, if there's goin' to be any talebearing I have a tale or two I can tell myself. What about that pretty housemaid over in the Women's Building, eh? You'd better hold your tongue.
- Syd.—Tell tales, would yer, too? You're a credit to the Home, ain't yer? Yer ought to be disciplined—and yer will be, too! (He mutters and fumes, but resumes his sweeping.)
- (LEAF, between relief and shame that WADDIE should take the blame for his breaking of the rules, decides to cover his confusion by singing a revival hymn. His voice is thin and reedy.)
- LEAF. Bringing in the sheaves,

 Bringing in the sheaves,

 We shall come rejoicing,

 Bringing in the sheaves.
- Syd. Yus, and most likely yer'd pinched them! (He tucks his broom under his arm, snatches up a pail of slops, and marches out, pausing at

the door to distribute a foreboding scowl all round. With his departure a cloud seems lifted from the room. The spring sunshine floods it, WADDIE opens the window behind him, and a fresh breeze enters, fluttering the dingy curtain.)

Spittal.—Bah! Tyrang! That's wot he is!

Anybody here say he's not a tyrang?

(Glares about.) Very well, then, don't say

so. Do yer want to know wot I think of him? Well, this is wot I think of him.

(Spits.) Anybody got anything to say against that? No? Well, then, don't say it!

LEAF. — I'm sure I try to be peaceable.

Spittal (glaring at him).—Are you willing to be tyrannized over?

LEAF. - No, no, not at all, not at all.

Spittal. — Very well, then don't say so!

(Leaf subsides, staring mildly before him. Mr. Beswetherick turns sidewise in his chair and gazes out through the windows skyward. Waddie is leaning against the sill, his blood quickened by the warm spring sunshine that caresses his gray head and strong shoulders.)

- Waddle (stretching out his arm and pointing).

 Over yonder in the Women's Building someone has set a flowerpot on the window sill. Something green is growing in it. Looks like a hyacinth.
- MR. BESWETHERICK (craning his neck).—I see it. Yes, it looks very much like a hyacinth. She must be a new inmate, for I never have seen a plant on the sills before and I've been here fifteen years. She must have a refined taste, and a spirit above the exigencies of her environment.
- Waddie. I don't know just what you mean by that, but she'll soon get over it in yonder.
- MR. BESWETHERICK. My wife was fond of flowers. And her favorite flower was the sweet-scented geranium. She always had one in the house. Well, after I came in here I was still missing her sorely, for she had not been dead quite two years I found one day when I was walking along the street, just at the corner where the church stands, a single shoot of scented geranium. (He pauses to let the wonder of it sink in.)

I carried it home — did I say home? — here, and stood it in a glass of water. I set it around the corner of the sill, so no one could see it, for of course I had no right to be keeping a good glass for my own private use. I used to look at it day after day, expecting always to find it wilted and dying; but no, it persisted in living. Then I fell ill with influenza. I was ill two weeks, and when I was convalescent I was too lowspirited to have any curiosity. Then one morning, just such a May morning as this, I remembered it. I crept weakly to the window, and what do you suppose had happened?

LEAF (mournfully). — It had shriveled up. Spittal. — Tyrangs had thrown it out!

Mr. Beswetherick (triumphantly). — No! What the dear geranium had done was this. It had sent down into the water one little white root, and it had thrown upward towards the blue sky two beautiful new leaves. It (his voice breaking) gave me new life. It filled me with love for God. I said, "What He does is best. He shows

the dear geranium how to send forth roots in this sad place."

LEAF. — Ah!

SPITTAL. — Hm!

WADDIE (his head out of the window).—Then what happened? Did it go on living?

MR. BESWETHERICK (sadly).—No, I suppose I should have got earth for it in some way. But it had seemed such a miracle, I accepted it as it was. But the exigencies of its environment were such that it could not bear up against them. One morning when I looked it was dead. But really, that sudden miracle filled me with love.

(A silence falls, broken only by the striking of a clock outside. Spittal's chin sinks on his chest. He dozes. Mr. Beswetherick puts his hand before his eyes.)

WADDIE (dreamily). — What a beautiful word love is!

(No one answers, but LEAF giggles a little.)

WADDIE. — When you think of all it means, love is a beautiful word.

(Pause, during which Spittal rouses himself.)

SPITTAL. - Speakin' o' what a beautiful word

bulb is—my missis had a bulb once. She kep' it in a bowl on the table. I came in late one night, wanting a bite. I got some bread and drips, then I spies the bulb. "Onion," I thinks, and slices it up and eats it! A terrible mild onion, I thinks. But the missis were n't mild. She threw the bowl at my head, and I had to give her a cuff afore she'd quieten down. Aye, it's a lovely word—bulb!

LEAF. — My missis never had no time for plants and bulbs. She was too busy having babies. Eleven of them we had. It kept my nose to the grindstone, and the only help they ever gave me was to put me in here.

SPITTAL. — I've got a darter. That young woman that comes to see me.

Mr. Beswetherick.—A comely young woman.

SPITTAL. — She brings me a bit of baccy and some peppermint lozenges. And a natural darter she is. My natural children turned out the best. The other kind allus seemed a bit unnatural.

Mr. Beswetherick. — Tell us, Waddie, how it was you never came to marry.

- Waddie (drumming with his fingers on the sill).

 Well, it was n't for lack of love.
- Mr. Beswetherick.—No, I should think not. You've been a fine-looking man in your day.
- Waddle (turning round on him).—Well, I'm not so bad now, am I? I'd be an ablebodied man if only I hadn't got my foot crushed in that accident, and I could have had it made all right if only I'd got the money to have those expensive treatments.
- Mr. Beswetherick (soothingly). Of course, of course.
- Spittal. Tell us about the gal, Waddie. Was she a pretty gal?
- WADDIE. Oh, she was pretty! Rosy and plump. A Devon girl, you know, with a soft, singsong Devon voice, and a neck—why, men, you never saw anything so white!
- Spittal.—I like 'em snowy white, and if they can't be snowy white, I say let 'em be black—black as coal.
- Waddie. I loved her right enough, but the hard thing was that she was promised to my brother Giles. She liked both of us, and bit

by bit, by this means and that, I wormed my way in between them, and she gave Giles the go-by, and took me on. Giles was terribly cut and went off to America, for he said he could n't abide to see our happiness together. Well, he had n't been gone above a month, and I was urging the wedding, when if the lass didn't begin to take notice of Jack Meadows, a carpet weaver, none too steady, nor sensible neither. What she saw in him I don't know, but it was n't long before she'd given another Waddie the mitten. It served me right for what I'd done to Giles, but that seemed only to make the suffering worse. Once I saw her married to Meadows I left Devon and went up to London. I've knocked pretty much over the world since then, but I've never come across Giles, though I heard he went to Chicago and did very well. She'd a bad life with Jack from what I've heard.

Mr. Beswetherick. — Well, it's all over now, Waddie.

WADDIE. — Yes, it's all over.

LEAF (chirpily). — Everything's over — he, he

— sowing and harvest—he, he! (He sings.) Bringing in the sheaves,

Bringing in the sheaves,

We shall come rejoicing,

Bringing in the sheaves.

SPITTAL. - Harvest Home, eh?

Waddle. — Yes — everything's over, men. But just suppose it was only beginning. Just suppose that we were all twenty-one or thereabouts, young and strong. And over in the Women's Building there (*he extends his arm*) suppose there were scores and scores of lovely girls, bright-eyed, full of fun, instead of — what there is! Only suppose . . .

(The men, deeply stirred, turn their old faces wistfully toward the patch of blue sky beyond the window, like poor old captive birds.)

Spittal (in a choky voice).—Don't, don't, Waddie! I can't bear it. It—it hurts me in here. (Thumps his chest.)

Mr. Beswetherick. — Life is very sad.

(Steps and voices are approaching. Syd, grinning triumphantly, enters, followed by the Matron. She is a stout, capable woman of

fifty-five. She has a stern eye, before which Spittal shrinks into his chair. She carries a letter in her hand. All but Spittal rise.)

Matron. — Good morning, men.

ALL. — Good morning, 'm.

MATRON. — Spittal, Syd tells me that you've refused to wash this morning.

Spittal (excitedly).—Now look here, ma'am, look here. Washing don't agree with me. It gives me neuralgy. It makes me feel all of a stew. Now you don't understand. I ran away to sea when I were fifteen, and I saw so much water for the next twenty years that I was clean fed up with it. Now listen. Does a horse wash his face? No. Yet a horse is a clean, nice-smelling beast. A fish washes his face all day long. Does anyone like the smell of fish? No. Very well, then, don't say so!

MATRON. — I don't like the smell of you. You'll be washed, or you shall not eat. You'll be disciplined. You know what that means. (To Syd.) Take him out and wash him. Comb his hair.

(SYD wheels SPITTAL from the room, the old

- man furious but helpless, Syd wearing a malicious grin.)
- MATRON. Now, Waddie, I'm told that you took food from the table and brought it in to Spittal. Is that true?
- WADDIE (composedly). Yes, Matron. And I'll not say I would n't do the same again.
- MATRON (suddenly, to LEAF). What are you trembling for, Leaf? One would think you were the guilty party.
- LEAF. It's sympathy, Matron. I'm full of sympathy.
- WADDIE. He's too tender-hearted for this place by a long shot.
- MATRON.—And you're too cheeky! I'll not tolerate it. You've got to go. (Yet, strangely enough, she is smiling broadly.)
- WADDIE (startled). Go? Go where?
- MATRON (smiling still more broadly).—Anywhere you like. (She displays the letter in her hand.) See this? It's a lawyer's letter. You're a rich man, Waddie. I was just on my way across with it when Syd met me. I thought I'd get rid of him and Spittal before I broke the news.

WADDIE (dazed). — But, Matron — I don't understand.

Matron. — Well, you're Joseph Waddie, are n't you?

WADDIE. - Yes.

MATRON. — Birthplace?

WADDIE. — Taunton.

MATRON. — Parents' names?

WADDIE. - William and Letitia.

MATRON. — Any brothers or sisters?

WADDIE. — One sister died in childhood. One brother who went to Chicago forty years ago. His name is Giles.

MATRON.—Not is Giles. Was. He's dead.

This is a lawyer's letter to say that he died three months ago in Chicago and left you his money. They've been all this time tracing you.

WADDIE. - Poor old Giles.

MATRON.—Not a bit of it. Rich old Giles.

He's left you ten thousand pounds. You and your wife. Wife dead, I suppose.

Waddie (as though in a dream).—He never knew I didn't marry Lucy . . .

Matron (inquisitively). — Lucy?

- Waddie.—Yes, we both loved the same girl, Lucy Frost. I took her from him and now he's left me all his money. (He presses his hands together and all but breaks down.)
- Mr. Beswetherick.—If only that good-fornaught Meadows hadn't stepped in you might be the happiest man alive at this minute.
- MATRON (eagerly). Meadows Lucy What age would she be now? What is she like?
- WADDIE. Oh, a pretty girl. One of your round, rosy ones. Eyes as blue as cornflowers, and a neck —
- MATRON. Listen to the man! I mean what is she like now?
- WADDIE. Why, I have n't seen her for forty years. She may be dead, poor lass.
- MATRON.—Listen to me, Waddie. Brace up, man. Dear me, you ought to be jumping for joy! I would if I was in your place. Would n't you, men?
- Mr. Beswetherick (solemnly laying his hand on Waddie's shoulder). Poor fellow, he

- is n't able to throw off the exigencies of his environment.
- LEAF.—I'd be gamboling like an old lamb, I would.
- WADDIE. Matron, have you news of Lucy for me?
- MATRON (coming close to him).—Only this.

 A woman of about sixty-three came in last week. Her name is Lucy Meadows. Rather superior. But I won't say she is n't a bit queer in the head.
- WADDIE (trembling). Was it her put out the hyacinth on the sill?
- MATRON. If she did, she didn't tell me anything about it. But they're always up to tricks. She's got a kind of turned-up nose.
- WADDIE (his hand to his throat).—It's her!

 It must be! Oh, a dear little nose—and such eyes!
- MATRON. Now I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going straight over to the Women's Building, and I shall fetch her across and let you see her for yourself. . . . Here's your letter. You can read it over while I'm gone. (Hands him the letter.)

My word, this is exciting! Is n't it, Leaf? Is n't it, Bes — what's your name?

- (She bounces out, taking the vitality from the atmosphere with her, but leaving the old men much more at ease. They relax; they smile at each other in a bewildered way.

 Leaf gets possession of Waddie's hand and saws it up and down, his own face quivering with emotion.)
- LEAF.—I'm glad for ye, Waddie. I could not speak out while Matron was here, 'cause of my nervous condition, but now let me say I'm glad for ye. Why, you're a free man, Waddie. You can go where you like, have all the good baccy and rich, sweet food you want. Why, you're rich, Waddie—a rich man. It's wonderful.
- WADDIE (warmly). Thank you, Leaf, and I'll not forget my old friends. Depend upon that. Fancy Giles leaving me his money.
- Mr. Beswetherick (also shaking hands).—
 And to find your old love again! For it
 may be she, Waddie. And to think that
 only a few minutes ago we were talking
 about love.

- Waddle. I have n't much hope that it's Lucy. She'd never have come down to this. Upon my soul, men, I'd sooner never meet her again than to know she'd suffered so much. (He bends his head over the letter to hide his emotion.)
 - (Beswetherick and Leaf speak in a low tone together... Spittal appears in the doorway in his chair wheeled by Syd. Spittal looks very much subdued, his face shining from soap and water, his thick gray hair sleek and moist on his bowed head. Syd brings him in with a flourish and pushes the chair with a bang into its place against the wall.)
- LEAF (mildly).—That's pretty rough usage, my boy. Pretty jolty for an old man.
- SYD (leaning over him).—'Ave a care or you'll be the next I'll complain of, see? (He espies on the floor the spot where SPITTAL, not long since, showed his contempt by spitting. Pointing.) Wot's this? Wot's this, I say? (He turns furiously on SPITTAL.) Yer spat, did yer? Spat on the floor when my back was turned? Thought I 'ad n't

enough to do without cleanin' the floor up after you, hey? First yer refuses ter be washed, then yer hexpectorates on me clean floor, you dirty, hexpectoratin', mischeevious, rampageous old cripple!

- (SPITTAL, during this tirade, has got angrier and angrier. He raises himself in his chair, his gray hair on end, facing SYD.)
- Spittal.—Dirty, hey? Expectoratin', hey? Mischeevious, hey? Rampageous, hey? Cripple, hey? Wot do you think you are, hey? You're a tyrang, that's wot you are! A tyrang! Do you say you're not a tyrang? No! Well, then, don't say so!
- Syd (on a deadly note). This is a matter for the Board, it is! Curse me if the next time I wash yer I don't drown yer, see? I'll tell you wot you are! Spittal be name, and spittle be nature, that's wot.
- (Spittal paws the air, speechless with rage and fear.)
- WADDIE. Hold hard, Syd. You ill-use Spittal and I'll do nothing for you. Be kind to him, and I'll make you a nice present before I go.

- SYD (sarcastically).—Before yer go! A present! Very good, sir. Very good, me lord Waddie.
- Mr. Beswetherick. You may well say "my lord," Syd. Mr. Waddie's brother has died in Chicago and left him ten thousand pounds.
- Syd.—Ten thousand pounds! (He adopts a fawning tone.) Oh, Mr. Waddie, I always knew you were a gentleman. I always knew you had a soul above yer surroundings. Many a time have I said in the kitchen, "Mr. Waddie didn't ought to be a hinmate 'ere. He ought to be at the head of an establishment of his own with a hincome of not less than ten thousand pounds."

Spittal. — Ten thousand pounds! Waddie!

Oh, why was n't it me? Why don't things like that happen to me? I'd have given you all a grand dinner—

WADDIE. — I will, Spittal.

SPITTAL. — And a year's baccy —

WADDIE. — So I shall.

Spittal. — And I'd have took the three of ye out of this dog's island and bought yer a

nice little villa and a maid to wait on yer, and your cellar full of beer and gin.

Waddie.—I'll do the very best I can for you.

(The Matron enters, followed by Lucy Meadows. She is a short, stout woman who has had a hard life. She habitually has a somewhat startled look in the eyes. She has preserved a certain air of youth in her movements, except that she carries her arms folded rather stiffly. Her hands are crippled by rheumatism. She is very neat and clean.)

- MATRON (boisterously).—Here she is! Well,
 I've been Matron here fifteen years, and
 this is the first time I've brought a lady
 across the courtyard to call on a gentleman
 —ha, ha.
- (WADDIE approaches Lucy Meadows and stares at her dumbly. She returns his look without recognition, plucking nervously at her sleeve with one crippled hand.)
- MATRON. I've explained to her that it is a proposal. I hope I've not been too impulsive.
- WADDIE (appealingly). May we be alone,

Matron, just for a moment? I can't rightly speak with all of you about.

- MATRON.—Now I call that ungrateful, Waddie.

 After all I've done for you, I'm not to be in at the happy ending.
- (Mr. Beswetherick is suddenly angry. He rises and waves his long arms.)
- Mr. Beswetherick.—Have you no sense of decency, that all of you should stand and gape at these two poor people?
- MATRON. Poor, indeed! That's an odd idea.
- Mr. Beswetherick.—Yes, poor in spite of that ten thousand pounds. Just think—forty years ago they lost each other—they were young and strong and beautiful then. Now they meet again—in a poorhouse. All those years are like a wall between them. They cannot get near to each other. Cannot touch each other. . . . These are two strangers trying to clasp hands over the grave of their child who was never born. Shall we make a show of them? No—no! Let us leave them in peace! (He turns away with a pitying gesture and goes out through door at left.)

- Syd.—Gawd, this is turnin' out ter be a blurry melerdramer! (He seizes the handle of the wheeled chair.) Come along, old charioteer, we'll fade away to soft music, while the audience gets a close-up of the lovers. (He wheels Spittal out, also at left.)
- (The Matron looks after them, smiling broadly, then turns to Waddie pettishly.)
- MATRON. You know, Waddie, it's strictly against rules to leave a man and a woman inmate alone together, but, considering the circumstances, I'll give you five minutes. (Looks at her wrist watch.) The old fellow who came in last night has had a bad spell and I must see how he's getting on.
- WADDIE. Thank you, Matron. (She goes out.) After all, I'm not an inmate here now, and I'll do what I please.
- LEAF (toddling on his two sticks to door at left).

 —I'm going, Waddie, and God bless you,
 Waddie. God bless you. (Hesitates.) I
 shall miss your protection. I shall indeed,
 Waddie. (Goes out.)
 - (Lucy Meadows continues to stand stolidly, her arms folded on her stomach. Waddie goes

- toward her excitedly, then turns away and begins rapidly to limp up and down the room.)
- Lucy (looking at his muffled foot). That's a bad foot you've got.
- Waddle. Yes, it's a very bad foot. I was getting out of a train at Plymouth when I slipped and my foot got struck by the wheel not actually crushed, but badly hurt. If I'd had the money to have a proper course of treatment, it wouldn't be like this to-day. I'd be an able-bodied man.
- Lucy. I hope you were n't tipsy when it happened.
- WADDIE. N-no, I was n't exactly tipsy, but I may have been a little gay.
- Lucy. You always was overfond of your glass, was n't you?
- WADDIE (indignantly).—I was nothing of the sort. My poor brother may have been.
- Lucy. Why, I never thought he liked it half as well as you. Ah, well, it's no matter now.
- WADDIE (stopping before her). Wasn't he a noble fellow, Lucy? (Doubtfully.) You are Lucy, aren't you?

Lucy. — Of course I am! As to him being noble, he'd a right to leave you his money after what he done to you—taking me away from you, and all.

WADDIE (staggered).—Who do you think I am?

Lucy. - Why, Giles Waddie, to be sure.

Waddie. — Why, Lucy, I'm nothing of the sort.
I'm Joseph — Joe Waddie, you know! You remember your Joe!

Lucy. -- Why, bless me, I thought all along you was Giles. Matron had me fair mazed, and Giles and Joseph sound alike, don't they?

WADDIE (much hurt). — I don't think so.

Lucy. — Well, it don't really signify, does it?
You might as well be Giles as Joe, might n't
you?

WADDIE. — I suppose so.

Lucy. — You see, I loved you both. I couldn't bear to marry either of you because it'd make the other so unhappy. That's why I took Meadows. Goodness, how long ago it seems!

WADDIE. - Lucy, was Meadows good to you?

Lucy.—Oh, yes. He'd knock me about once in a while when he was vexed, but nothing to speak of. He was almost always goodnatured, and a good provider, too.

WADDIE (gently.) — Well, Lucy, what brought you down to this, my poor girl?

Lucy (with a little gasp).—It was him getting the consumption. He was bedridden a year. It was terrible, Giles.

WADDIE (sadly). — Joe, Lucy.

Lucy. - Aye, Joe, if you like.

WADDIE. - Has he been dead long?

Lucy. — Eighteen years last Whitsuntide. But I kept my little cottage after he was gone. I always worked at the lace weaving, you remember, Giles, and I kept my cottage, and pretty snug at that, till last year when the rheumatics got so bad in my hands. Then I had to sell my bits of furniture a stick at a time, till there was nothing left but the Home. Rector got me in and I know I should be grateful, but, oh, Joey—I mean Giles—it was terrible to lose my cottage where I'd been independent, like. All I could bring along was my box of

clothes, a quilt, a brooch your brother Joseph gave me once when he was trying to wean me away from you—

WADDIE. — Oh, Lucy!

- Lucy. And a pot of hyacinths I had, just coming into bud. (Suddenly her stoicism deserts her and she bursts into tears, crying aloud like a child.)
- Waddie (putting his arms about her).—There, dear—there, there, dearie! It'll be all right now. Nothing more to be frightened of—your own cottage again—the pot of hyacinths on your own window sill, and—me, Lucy—if you'll have me.
- Lucy. And you'll be kind to me, won't 'ee?
- Waddie (patting her back).—Lucy, I've never forgot you all these years. I never married. You shall have everything you want. Just think—ten thousand pounds!
- Lucy (pleadingly). Would 'ee have known me, Giles?
- Waddie (gazing into her face).—Ah, forty years makes a difference, girl. Do you mind how golden your hair was? (He tenderly touches her white head.)

- Lucy.—Lord save us, I could sit on it then, Giles!
- WADDIE. And your smooth, milk-white neck.

 (He closes his eyes.) And your throat
 where a little pulse used to beat like a little
 young bird fluttering —
- Lucy. Don't! don't! (Her hand is on her throat.)
- WADDIE. And your eyes (He opens his own and gazes into hers.) Your eyes are just the same I see the old Lucy in your eyes, thank God!
- Lucy (humbly).—I shan't be able to work hard for 'ee, Giles, with these hands all bent with the rheumatics.
- Waddie (taking her hands in his).—Oh, your poor hands, Lucy—your poor hands! (He bends his head over them with something approaching a sob.)
- Lucy (half-laughing). Why, you are Joey, after all. He was always a great zany, ready to cry if you crooked your finger at him. Poor Joey. (She puts her arm about his shoulders now, and kisses his cheek.)
- WADDIE. Ten thousand pounds, Lucy just think!

Lucy. — Why, bless me, we'll be just like the King and Queen!

(The MATRON enters officiously.)

MATRON. — Time more than up. Now what are you going to do, Waddie?

WADDIE. - What would you advise, 'm?

MATRON.—I advise you to go to this lawyer's office and get things settled up, and then if you and Mrs. Meadows are going to get married, you had better get a license and not waste any time.

WADDIE. — Just let me get my hat.

Lucy (anxiously). — Don't leave me, Joey.

MATRON. — You'll be all right, Mrs. Meadows.

Just trot along with me and we'll tell the news to the other women. Dear me, how jealous they'll be! (To WADDIE.)

Do you think she's a bit queer in the head?

Waddie (hat in hand).—Not a bit of it. (He goes to Lucy with a glowing look and takes her by the hand.)

MATRON (looking at her watch). — Come along, both of you.

SPITTAL's chair appears, pushed by Mr. BE-

SWETHERICK. SPITTAL in a state of great excitement.)

SPITTAL. - Wait! Wait!

WADDIE. — I'll be back presently.

- Spittal.—But wait! Stand together as you are.

 Now! Best wishes! Bride and groom!

 (He showers them both with small bits of torn-up white paper which he has had concealed.)
- SPITTAL (shouting).—Hurrah! Hurrah! Ha! ha! Good wishes, Waddie and Mrs. Waddie!
- LEAF (who has followed the chair).—He tore up my entire writing pad. But no matter.
- Spittal (bilariously).—It's confetti, Waddie, you know. You're covered with it! Waddie and Mrs. Waddie! Hurrah!
- LEAF and Mr. Beswetherick. Hurrah!
- (WADDIE, much moved, shakes hands with all three in turn. Lucy, too, shakes hands with the men. Spittal grasps her and, drawing her to his chair side, imprints a loud kiss on her cheek.)
- MATRON (a little impatient).—Hurry along, now.

- Mr. Beswetherick.—Come, Leaf. We'll see them to the door.
- (MATRON, WADDIE, with Lucy, Mr. Besweth-ERICK assisting Leaf, go out, in that order. Spittal is left alone, but not for more than a moment. Syd enters briskly and, grasping the handle of the chair, begins to wheel the protesting old man from the stage in the opposite direction.)
- Spittal (as they disappear).—Tyrang! That's what you are! A tyrang!

CURTAIN

THE RETURN OF THE EMIGRANT

CHARACTERS

MAGGIE NOLAN
MARY, her sister
KIRSTEEN, her daughter

"The Return of the Emigrant" was first acted in Hart House Theatre, Toronto, on March 12, 1928, with the following cast:—

MARY Dora McMillan Maggie Beatrice Brook
KIRSTEEN Irene Irwin Clarke

SCENE

A peasant's cabin in the South of Ireland. The room is sparsely furnished with such poor things as MAGGIE NOLAN has been able to get together. She has had a hard struggle to keep a roof over the heads of herself and young KIRSTEEN since her husband died ten years ago. She has managed it, but the struggle has left its mark on her face. She is a dark, eager woman about thirty-six. She is laying the table for three people, and, as she places a plate of bread, her daughter KIRSTEEN, a sweet-looking girl of eighteen, enters.

MAGGIE. — Did ye get the eggs?

KIRSTEEN. — Yes. I got three eggs. Two of them laid to-day and one yesterday. And all three as white as the snow itself. Just come and take a peep at them, Ma.

(Maggie comes and looks into the bag. The eyes of mother and daughter meet in a look of happy excitement.)

- MAGGIE (laughing). Och, I never did see such white eggs! You'd think they'd been laid by a snow-white dove instead of a wee black hen.
- KIRSTEEN. That's true enough. The O'Rafferty's hens are all black. How quare it is to think that a wee black hen would make a pure white egg, now is n't it?
- Maggie. Well, I'm black enough and I made you, and look at the white skin of you!
- KIRSTEEN. -- Aw, what funny things you say, Ma! I niver heard the like o' them. (She throws her arms about MAGGIE and bugs ber.)
- Maggie. Look out, now, or you'll break the eggs! Mebbe you've broke one already. (She snatches the bag and peers into it.) There, now — what did I tell you? You've cracked one clean in two! It's a good beatin' you deserve. What do you think your Auntie 'll say if we give her a cracked egg on her home-comin', and her away so long?
- Kirsteen. Och, she'll not notice. She'll be so brave and glad to be home. I can scarcely

believe I'll see her at last, and me longin' all my life to set eyes on her! (She dances lightly around the table, appraising the unusually grand meal.) There's the fine white bread, and there's the cheese, and there's the grand spice cake. And then (laughing teasingly) there's the cracked egg!

- MAGGIE. Ah, Kirsteen, if you feel like dancin', think what I must feel! To see my own sister again, I have n't heard the voice of these twenty years!
- KIRSTEEN. Twenty years, is it? That's a long time, and you two just young girls then.
- MAGGIE. Aye. I was over young for emigratin', so that's the way the priest's house-keeper took me into her service when my Mother and Da died.
- KIRSTEEN.—I know, and Auntie went across the water to America. Poor Auntie, to be cut off from her own folk, and her own land!
- MAGGIE.—Perhaps you're thinkin' I should have gone with her, Kirsteen.
- KIRSTEEN. No, for if you'd gone out yonder you would n't have met my Da, and then

MAGGIE.—No, but I might have got a rich American husband.

Kirsteen.—Then I wouldn't have been me at all!

Maggie. — Och, it was better as it was.

(She seats herself and, taking Kirsteen's hand, holds it against her cheek.)

Kirsteen. — Well, Ma, why didn't Auntie marry a rich American, then?

MAGGIE. — She niver had no chance. She was on the prairies the first years where there were n't any rich folk. She had to slave all day long in a kitchen. By evenin' she was too tired to throw a wink at a lad. Then, when things got better with her, her one thought was to save enough to come home to you and me for the rest of her days. Sure, she would n't have had the prisident hisself, and stopped in America. Many a time she's written down in her letters how her eyes ached for the sight of the greenness, and her staring out at the brown prairie, or the ugly streets.

KIRSTEEN (thoughtfully).—Johnny Moore does be goin' out.

Maggie. — Goin' out to America! The poor bye! Kirsteen. — Johnny says it's better nor starvin' here, and him not able to get a dacent job. (She is putting the eggs on to boil.)

MAGGIE. — Och, he'll find it quare and lonesome out there! He'd better come over and hear what our Mary'll have to say about it. (She looks at the clock.) God bless me, it's gettin' past the time she should come. Och, suppose now that Milligan's car would be overturned and her be killed on her way home after all these years! Do go to the door, Kirsteen, and try if you can see head or tail of it.

(KIRSTEEN runs to the door and looks out.)

KIRSTEEN (jumping up and down with excitement).—Oh, oh, it's herself is comin' down the road past Biddy Flanigan's! I know it's her by the way the children is all runnin' to stare. Milligan's car is broke down over by the bridge, and Auntie is walkin' and carryin' her own bag. Och! I think I'd better be runnin' to meet her!

- Maggie.—For the love of God, do, Kirsteen! She'll think it's a quare home-comin', what with the car broke down and her traipsin' the road, carryin' her bag and all.
- (KIRSTEEN goes out, and MAGGIE stands motionless in the middle of the room, her eyes fixed on the door, and an almost hysterical smile on her face.)
- MAGGIE (her hand on her heart). She's comin'! She's comin'! To think that Mary's walkin' down the same street she ran barefoot over! Mary . . . Mary . . . Mary . . .
- (MARY appears in the doorway, followed by KIRSTEEN carrying her bag, which is large and heavy. Mary is very different from her sister after all these years in America. Her face is harder, holder, and, while it bears the marks of physical and mental strain, there is a youthful jauntiness about her which Maggie has long lost. She is dressed in stylish but cheap American clothes. She stands on the threshold a moment, as though hewildered. Then Maggie goes to her almost shyly.)

MAGGIE. - Mary! Is it yourself, my dear?

Mary. — It is. How are you, Maggie?

MAGGIE. — I'm bravely, thank you.

(They move gropingly toward each other, trying to reconcile their girlish recollections
with the mature reality of the present.
Then suddenly their shyness, which almost
amounts to fear, is over, and they fall into
each other's arms, crying. Kirsteen sets
down the bag with a thud, and eyes them
disapprovingly.)

Kirsteen (disgustedly). — What a way to carry on, when you're supposed to be glad! I wonder at ye, I do.

Mary. - Och, Maggie!

Maggie. — Aw, Mary!

(They separate, half-laughing, half-crying.)

Mary.—I'd have knowed you anywhere, Maggie!

Maggie. — I would n't have knowed you, Mary. You've got so quare and grand.

MARY (pleased). — Have I, then?

MAGGIE. - Och, look at the fine clothes of ye!

Kirsteen.—And look at the shiny bag, all thricked out with brass!

MAGGIE. — And the scarf! And the gloves!

KIRSTEEN. - Och, it's like a lady she is!

Mary (bridling). — Land alive, they're only my second-best ones. I've a trunk full of smart clothes coming.

KIRSTEEN. — How funny she talks!

MAGGIE. — Hould your whist, child. (She begins to help MARY to lay aside her outdoor things, pausing to admire each article.)

MARY (staring about).—Ireland! Ireland! Am I back in Ireland? Oh, Maggie, tell me I'm not dreaming! The times I've dreamed of this day! And it's come . . . it's come . . . and I'm home. . . . Oh, Maggie, are we real?

MAGGIE (stroking her hand).—Och, we're quare and real, Mary. And here's my Kirsteen, and her talkin' about you iver since she could put three words togither.

(MARY kisses Kirsteen and stares into her face with a dreamy look.)

Mary. — Little Kirsteen . . . am I really seeing you, at last!

Kirsteen. — Won't us three be happy together! Mary. — She's not like you, Maggie.

- MAGGIE. No, she favors Tom, but she's venturesome in her ways like you was as a girl. You was bolder nor I was. If I done anything wild you always stud up fur me to Da.
- MARY. I guess I did! Well, I've had to stand up for myself out there or I'd have gone under many a time. It's a good thing I was bold, I can tell you!
- KIRSTEEN. Aw, do let's sit down to our tea.

 Everything will be spoiled. I've had the tay stewin' this long while, and the eggs is cooked.
- MAGGIE (grandly).—I hope you've cooked plenty of eggs, Kirsteen. Your Auntie 'll be rare and hungry.

KIRSTEEN. — Aye, I've cooked the three.

MARY. — I never eat more than one.

(They go to the table, but before they sit down Mary catches Maggie in her arms and gazes hungrily into her eyes.)

MAGGIE. — Are ye so glad, Mary?

Mary. — I feel solemn, like, with gladness. What I've striven for and denied myself for all these years . . . come true at last. Me at home . . . with you . . . in Ireland.

- KIRSTEEN (sententiously.) The country's in a tarrible state.
- MAGGIE. Oh, yes, it's in a tarrible state. (She looks anxiously over the table as they seat themselves.)
- KIRSTEEN (cheerfully). Don't worry! I have the cracked one.
- Mary (puzzled). The cracked one?
- MAGGIE.—Och, there was a cracked cup I did n't want ye to sup from.
- Mary.—As though I cared! (But she looks the table over doubtfully, the coarseness of the dishes and the cloth and the plainness of the meal seeming strange to her.)
- MAGGIE (helping her to bread).—Have plenty of drippin's til your bread, Mary, and it'll put some flesh on ye. You'll not be gettin' drippin's like that in America!
- Mary (taking some drippings).—No....
 What do you suppose my mistress paid for butter? Creamery butter. Dairy butter was n't good enough for us. Well, she paid fifty cents a pound. That 'd be two shillings.
- MAGGIE (open-mouthed).—Did you ever hear the like!

Mary.—And for supper we had cold veal or chicken, and a salad with French dressing, and mebbe canned pineapple, a jelly with whipped cream, and, of course, a layer cake with frosting.

MAGGIE. — Fur the love of God!

Kirsteen (in a little voice).—Is yet egg all right?

Mary (laconically). — Sure. It's swell.

Maggie. — But you'd a quare hard time whin ye first went out, didn't ye?

Mary. — I'll say I did! I worked like a nigger.

And, oh, the bitter long winters and the homesickness, and the dreary land!

Maggie (brightening).—No wonder you're thankful to be home in Ireland again!

Kirsteen. — Tell us more about America.

MAGGIE. — Let the wumman be! She wants to forget all that.

(They proceed with the meal, Maggie and Kirsteen eating roughly, but Mary with a kind of finicking daintiness, sipping her tea with little finger quirked.)

Kirsteen. — Aw, Ma, I want to hear about it! Maggie. — Very well, then. Tell us more about the hard life on the prairies.

- KIRSTEEN. No, no! About the fine things to eat and wear, and the crowds and the theayters!
- MAGGIE. Och, she didn't have no money for theayters and suchlike. She was too busy savin' up to come home. Is n't that so, Mary?
- MARY. Yes, that's true enough.
- KIRSTEEN.—Aw, but mebbe she had a young man what took her out sometimes, eh, Auntie?
- Mary (smiling shyly). Yes, Kirsteen, I did.
- KIRSTEEN. Aw, Auntie, why didn't you marry him, then? Didn't you like him enough?
- Mary (a shadow crossing her face).—Oh I liked him, but he was as poor as a church mouse. It'd have meant startin' all over again to work, and givin' up all my hopes of comin' home to the old land.
- MAGGIE. Ye done well to refuse him, Mary. It's a quare foine man it'd be worth stayin' in a counthry like yon for.
- Mary (with a movement as of throwing off bonds).—That's what I thought. I wanted to come home where things don't change

the way they do out there. Where the folks are n't always talking about how big things are, and how much bigger they're going to be. I wanted to get home to where things look the same as they did in my great-grandfather's time, and as they'll look in another hundred years. That's what I call living. That's what I call peace.

- KIRSTEEN (laughing). Sure, Ireland's a funny place to come to find peace in!
- Mary. Oh, the Free State and Black an' Tans won't worry me. I'm not the one to get excited about politics, nor religion either.
- MAGGIE.—You would n't be makin' friends with Protestants, would ye?
- MARY. There's good and bad on both sides.

 I'm not botherin' my head about it.
- KIRSTEEN. That's just what Johnny Moore says! I think I feel that way myself. Good and bad on both sides why worry?
- MAGGIE (angrily).—What do you know about it?
- KIRSTEEN. I've a right to my thoughts.
- Maggie. It seems to me Johnny Moore's thoughts are your thoughts.

MARY. — Who is this Johnny Moore?

KIRSTEEN. — Oh, he's a young fella here. He's goin' out to America.

Maggie. — You remember Michael Moore, Mary. He used to be swate on yourself. Well, this is his oldest bye.

MARY.—How strange it seems! Things don't stand still even here.

MAGGIE. -- Ah, well, there's always birth and death. But seein' that the numbers of them are about equal, it's standin' still after all.

KIRSTEEN. — Aw, Auntie, tell us more about the fine way they live in America!

MARY (picking up a spoon). — Well, for instance, you'd never see an old pewter spoon like that. Their cutlery is all fine silver — bright and shiny — with a special kind of fork for every kind of food. And little wee lace mats to set the plates on.

(MAGGIE and KIRSTEEN burst out laughing).

KIRSTEEN. - Did you iver hear the like?

Maggie (wiping her mouth on the back of her hand).—Well, it's thankful I am I don't live that way!

MARY (enigmatically). — You've a lot to be thankful for.

Maggie. — What do you mean, Mary?

Mary.—I mean you've been here all your life.
You've never been unsettled, torn up by
the roots. There I was, torn up in my
young-girlhood, thrown down in a new
country to take root as best I could. And
it was a hard thing, I can tell you, to send
out roots in that cruel place I first went to.

MAGGIE. — Och, but your heart was always rooted in Ireland!

Mary.—I guess it was. But still, twenty-odd years is a long time. I could n't help gettin' to feel settled in a way, especially when the living got more comfortable. Now, comin' home like this, I feel so queer, I hardly know whether I'm on my head or my heels!

KIRSTEEN.—Have some more of the currant bun, will ye?

Mary. - No, I thank you, I couldn't eat another mouthful.

MAGGIE. — A drop more tay, then?

Mary. - Not a drop.

(They rise from the table. MAGGIE puts the

food into the cubboard. KIRSTEEN examines Mary's bat, and sticks it on her own head, unseen by MARY, for she has gone to the window and is beering out.)

MARY. — Oh, the funny little street!

MAGGIE. - Yes, it's a quare wee street, isn't it? I suppose ye'd forgot how quare and wee it is!

Mary. — I had. The houses look as though they'd had a knock on the head that had flattened them, and the thatched roofs and the duck pond (beginning to laugh) and the pig in the street, and all!

Maggie. — And, och, the goin's-on in the wee street! The milkman in the mornings, the butcher's cart, Tim Rooney, the peddler, all the children racin' from school, the gossipin' and the love-makin' -

KIRSTEEN (bitterly). — Ay, and the bloodshed, too. D' ye mind when the sogers fired on the crowd and young Jim Ritchie was killed?

Maggie. - Don't, don't, Kirstie!

Mary (turning round and looking about her). -To think that I'm here!

- MAGGIE. Och, Mary, you're safe now at home, for the rest of your days.
- Mary. Yes, I'm safe at home, where I've been longin' to be all these years. (She puts up her hand toward the ceiling.) Look, I can almost touch the ceiling with my hand!
- KIRSTEEN. It seems to press down on ye, like, doesn't it?
- MAGGIE. It may be low, but it's all the homelier fur that.
- (MARY sits down on a chair in the centre of the room and MAGGIE draws another chair close and sits beside her. KIRSTEEN establishes herself on a stool at their feet. The first shadow of evening falls.)
- Mary (putting her arm about Maggie).—
 You'll always seem just my little sister
 Maggie, for all you've got Kirsteen. . . .
 When I think of how we used to run barelegged about this village street, and how I
 fretted for you when I was out on the
 prairie, and now—I've got you!
- KIRSTEEN.—And you've got me, too! Don't forget that!

Mary (putting a loving hand on her neck).—
Yes, I've got you.

MAGGIE. — She's a child and nothin' else. She never wants to be away from her ma.

MARY. - I should think not.

KIRSTEEN. — Aw, Ma fusses over me so! You'd think I was a baby. Sometimes I feel — (She does not go on, but, dropping her head on her hand, falls silent.)

Mary. - What do you feel, Kirsteen?

KIRSTEFN. — Aw, Ma'll be vexed if I say!

Mary.—No, she won't. Out with it! What do you feel?

KIRSTEEN. — Somethin' stirrin' in me here. I don't know just what it is, but it moves, an' it pains.

(The two women look at each other across her head with pitying smiles.)

MAGGIE. — Just wait, darlin'. There's plenty of time for you.

KIRSTEEN (scornfully).—Aw, I don't mean love! I mean (she stretches out her arms)
—I don't know what I mean!

Mary.—We women never do know what we mean.

KIRSTEEN. — It is that — I want — something.

MAGGIE. - Och, we all want something - till we git it, and then - as like as not - we don't want it.

Mary. - True for you, Maggie.

KIRSTEEN. — Tell us more about America. Auntie.

Mary. - Well, now, let's see. . . . You mind the little prairie town I went to first. It was as ugly a spot as ever I set eyes on when I first saw it. Hideous clapboard houses, and not a tree in sight, and all the folks poor and overworked, and with seldom a laugh on their lips. When I'd think of the greenness of Ireland, and the songs, and the laughter, and the Fair days, I thought my heart would break with the homesickness. But, for all that, my wages was bigger than my father had ever made in Ireland, and I put away every cent, against the time I could come home.

Maggie. — But you used to send me a bit now and again for new shoes or a ribbon for my hair.

MARY. — Ah, it was little enough I sent you.

KIRSTEEN. — You sent me my christenin' dress! MAGGIE. — Och, she was the darlin' baby!

Mary (kindling). - Wait now, listen! I want to tell you how the town grew. My, it was wonderful! First a railway came that way. Then a big meat-packing concern opened a plant there. Then came along shoe factories and canneries, and implement works. The next thing we knew we had fine paved streets, so wide you could hardly see across them, blazing with electric lights, and buzzing with electric cars and automobiles. All sorts of swell stores opened, filled with goods from New York and Chicago, and even Paris. All kinds of elegant homes were built, with hardwood floors and marble bathrooms. It all came so fast it took our breath away. You've no idea. I could n't make you understand what it was to see that little low-built town spring up into tall white buildings like towers, and crowds of people, and money rolling in.

MAGGIE. — It's past belief!

Kirsteen (her face illumined).—It's like a fairy tale!

- Mary.—The folks I worked for got rich, and they moved into one of the new apartment houses. We was on the fifth floor with an elevator to take us up and down, and an electric range, and an electric refrigerator, and a vacuum cleaner, and an incinerator for the waste.
- MAGGIE (aghast at the strange words).—God help us, it sounds like cursin'!
- KIRSTEEN. It's a marvel you iver wanted to lave it!
- Mary. Ah, Kirsteen, I'd had my mind set on coming home all those years, and when the boss died, and then the missis, and she left me a little money, I says to myself, now's the time to go home, while you're still young, and you can enjoy life with your sister and little niece for many a long year.
- KIRSTEEN. And the years are long here. Dear me, a year seems like a lifetime. Even a day, from dawn to dusk is long, long. It just trickles along like a wee stream through a bog, niver gettin' anywhere.

(Another shadow falls.)

Maggie. — Why should we try to get anywhere? Life's just a quare kind of bog, and the only time we get anywhere is when it's over.

(A knock sounds on the door.)

MARY (giving a start).—I declare my nerves feel on the jump in this place!

MAGGIE. — It'll be one of the girls to see Kirsteen.

(KIRSTEEN goes to the door. She opens it and then steps outside, closing it after her.)

MAGGIE. — I think I'll light the candles. (She lights two candles, while MARY watches her with a strange, wondering smile.)

Maggie (turning back to her with an answering smile, but hers is a smile of content).—Now isn't this lovely—all us togither?

(KIRSTEEN sticks her head in at the door.)

KIRSTEEN. — Johnny's here, and he wants me to run over to his place for a wee bit. Him and Kathleen has something to tell me. Don't let Auntie tell anything while I'm gone!

Maggie. - Don't be long, now.

- Kirsteen. Och, I won't be five minutes. (She disappears.)
- (MAGGIE gets a basket of darning and begins to mend a stocking.)
- Maggie. Och, how the stockings do go! We never wore them when we was girls except to church. Do you remember our bare feet and the way our clogs 'd clatter on the floor? Things are getting different. Kirsteen will have her stockings.
- MARY. If she was over *there*, it would be silk she'd be wantin'.
- Maggie. Thank God, we're not over there!
- MARY. Oh, there's nice things about life over there, too. It's not all bad, I can tell you.
- MAGGIE. Nothing you've told me has made me want to go there.
- Mary. Well, for one thing, there's a chance for everybody.
- MAGGIE. A chance to sink or swim. It's all very fine for them that's on top.
- MARY. Yes, but there's none so far down that they may not get up sometime.
- MAGGIE. And wear theirselves out doin' it.
- Mary. Look at my old boss and his missis!

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They were poor enough to begin with. He'd started off as a laborer, and look what they came to!

MAGGIE. — Where did you say they are now?

MARY. - Why, they're dead.

MAGGIE (sarcastically). — Ah!

MARY. — But they had a good time first.

MAGGIE.—I suppose they did—(musingly) ridin' up and down in the elevaytor, as ye call it, and workin' the vaycuum cleaner, whativer that may be, and burnin' wee scraps of things in the incriminator . . . aye, 't was a lovely life!

Mary. — Maggie, Maggie, what a funny woman you are!

MAGGIE. — Tell me, now, did they iver let you have a wash in that marble bath?

Mary. — Goodness, no! I had a bathroom all to myself.

MAGGIE. — You're not askin' me to believe that, are ye?

MARY. - Indeed, it's true.

MAGGIE. - With a marble tub an' all?

MARY. —I did.

Maggie. — And how often did you use it?

Mary. — Oh, I generally had a hot bath after my day's work.

Maggie. — Och, Mary, you're not askin' me to believe that, are ye?

Mary. - Sure, I am.

Maggie. — Well, I call it indecent! We was niver made to carry on with our bodies like that. You might as well be livin' in a harem.

MARY.—Oh, what an idea! Our bodies was give to us to keep clean, was n't they?

Maggie. — Aye, but not unnatural clean. There's a certain amount o' dirt that's natural to us, and if you kape it off the body, as likely as not, it gets on to the soul.

Mary. — Oh, Maggie, what a woman you are!

Maggie. — I'm a natural wumman, but you're what America has made ye! But ye'll soon git over it, my dear.

MARY. - Oh, yes, I'll soon get over it.

MAGGIE. — And you're happy to be home?

MARY.—Is n't it what I've been struggling towards for twenty years?

(She gets up, crosses to MAGGIE, bends over her

- and kisses her, then goes to the window and looks out.)
- Mary.—Oh, the darkness of the street! It seems to press in on you. Was it always so dark, Maggie?
- Maggie. It was darker, for the Foleys across the way have a fine new lamp, and they used to burn just candles.
- MARY. Yes, that would make a difference to the street.
- MAGGIE. Och, it makes a quare difference to the street. Ye can see their windows ever so far.
- MARY. Are n't you nervous having Kirsteen out in the blackness?
- MAGGIE. Aye, I'm a wee bit nervous, though I've no reason to be at all, for I know she's over to the Moores', but the truth is I'm always a bit nervous when Kirsteen's away. I can't bear her out o' my sight.
- MARY (wistfully).—Perhaps you'll not miss her so when she runs out, now that I'm home.
- MAGGIE. Perhaps not . . . but I wish she'd come.

MARY.—I hear her now, running down the street. There she goes, past the window!

(An instant later, the door is thrown open, and Kirsteen appears on the threshold.)

KIRSTEEN (panting).—Och, I ran all the way!

MAGGIE (sharply).—Well, shut the door after
ve! You're lettin' all the could in.

(KIRSTEEN shuts the door and comes slowly, but with an air of suppressed excitement, into the middle of the room.)

MAGGIE. — What did Johnny want?

KIRSTEEN. — Aw, he wanted to tell me something.

Maggie. — I won't have him makin' love to ye! Sure, he's got no prospecks.

KIRSTEEN. — He has so got prospecks.

MAGGIE (sarcastically). — I'd like to know what they are!

Mary. — Was he making love to you, dearie?

KIRSTEEN. — He was not.

Maggie. — What are these prospecks, now?

KIRSTEEN. - Prospecks of goin' til America!

Maggie. — Och, you tould me that before.

KIRSTEEN (slowly).—His sister Kathleen is goin' with him.

Maggie. — Och, is she, then? God comfort her poor mother!

Kirsteen (desperately).—An' I'm goin', too —yes, I am!

MAGGIE. — Don't say such a thing, darlin', even in fun.

KIRSTEEN. — I'm not in fun. I'm in airnest.

MAGGIE (springing up).—Let me hear no more o' this! What does Johnny Moore mean puttin' such wicked ideas in your head?

KIRSTEEN. — Auntie went over, and ye don't call her wicked.

MAGGIE. — You're all I have in the world.

Kirsteen. — You were all she had in the world.

Besides, I would n't be leavin' ye alone.

You've got Aunt Mary. I'd never have gone if she had n't come home.

MARY. - Kirsteen, don't say that!

MAGGIE (turning on her).—It was you put the idea intil her head! With all your blether about what a grand counthry it is!

Mary. — Didn't I pinch and save for twenty years to get out of it?

MAGGIE. — And did n't ye sit in yonder chair and

- KIRSTEEN. Ma, Johnny Moore has been beggin' me to go out with him for weeks.
- MAGGIE. —I daresay he has! But did ye iver think of goin' till your Auntie blethered about the way they live there? (She grips Kirsteen by the arm.) Tell the truth, now, did ye?
- MARY. Kirsteen, I never said one word to urge you on to going, now did I?
- Maggie. Och, hould yer tongue! You've said too much already. I'm goin' to have the truth out o' her. (She gives Kirsteen a little shake.) Come now, darlin', it was the things Auntie tould, was n't it, that made ye set your mind on goin'?
- Kirsteen.—No, no. But when Johnny and Kathleen said they was goin', I began to tell the way things rushed along so grand and fast there, and we all got wild with longin', and they said, "Kirsteen, you've got to come, too," and I said, "I will"—nothing's goin' to stop me!

MAGGIE. - Not even me, your mother, Kirsteen?

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Think of the way I've loved ye, worked for ye! Have ye a stone in your wee breast instead of a heart? Why, I was lovin' ye before you were born! And when you were a baby you were hardly ever out o' my arms. D' ye mind the way I'd carry you to the duck pond in the evenin's to see the ducks fed, when you were like a wee fluffy ducklin', yourself? And the way we've gone to the fair together? And plucked brambleberries together? And knelt at Mass together? And slept together, Kirsteen. . . . Och, the child's hardly been out o' my arms! (She throws back her head and wrings her hands.)

Kirsteen. — Oh, Ma, don't take on so, don't!

(She throws her arms about Maggie and holds her passionately to her.)

MARY.—It's a strange home-coming I've had!

MAGGIE.—Aye, a strange home-coming! To
think you'd cross the ocean to do the like
o' this!

Mary. — Kirsteen, you must n't go! You must forget anything I've said about the life there. Put it out of your head. You'll

break your mother's heart if you leave her now - and mine, too - with the thought -the thought - that I done it.

Maggie (in a cooing voice, stroking Kirsteen's head). - Aw, she's not goin' to leave her ma. It was just a quare notion she had, but she's over it bravely, are n't you, my darlin'?

KIRSTEEN. — I must — I must —

Maggie (bushing her from her.) - Must must! Listen to the girl! She's gone fev. she has! (She turns pitifully to MARY.) Say a wee word to her, Mary, the way you'll mebbe bring her back.

Mary. — Aw, Kirsteen, it 'd be a hard life you'd go to, as like as not out there. Believe me, your heart 'd ache for your ma many and many the time, and she'd never, never forgive me, and us two alone here in this lonesome place.

MAGGIE. - Listen to yer auntie now, darlin'.

KIRSTEEN. — Both of your listen to me! It's been in my heart these long months to go. My heart's cried out for something different. I want to be intil a life that's moving - not stagnant like the duck pond yonder!

- MAGGIE. Och, but the wee white ducks, are n't they happy? Sailing across the smooth pond?
- Kirsteen.—Are they as happy as the eagle, sailing on the wind?
- Maggie (scornfully).—It 's a grand eagle you'd be—with your wings no bigger nor a man's hand!
- KIRSTEEN. A man's hand yes. My wings are a man's hands Johnny's hands. . . . He'll help me to fly.
- Mary. Do you mean he wants to marry you, Kirsteen?
- KIRSTEEN. He does. We'll marry and go out together him and Kathie an' me.
- MAGGIE. A baby like you to be married!
- KIRSTEEN. I'm older nor you were when you married Da.
- MAGGIE. Now, that's cliver o' ye! But I was twice the girl you are.
- KIRSTEEN. Parents always were. Johnny's Da said the very same thing to him.
- MARY. It 's a strange home-coming I've had.
- MAGGIE. It was a grand home-coming till you started your blether about them marble baths an' things.

- MARY (wistfully). It would perhaps be better if I'd never have come.
- Maggie (relenting and laying her hand on Mary's arm). Och, don't say that, Mary! Ye meant no harm. But God's curse be on them Moores for the mischief they've done.
- KIRSTEEN (angrily). Good grief, Ma, I wish ye'd stop your goin' on about the Moores! Johnny and me is goin' to marry, and we're goin' out to America, an' I'm not lavin' ye by yer lone, for you've got your own sister you've been yearnin' over these twenty years.
- MAGGIE. Have done wi' it! I'll not listen to such talk. I'll just go over to Father Dillon's and see what he'll have to say about it. Where's me shawl?
- (She sees her shawl, hanging from a nail on the wall, takes it down as though in a daze, and puts it over her head.)
- KIRSTEEN (tenderly). It's beginnin' to rain, Ma. You'll get quare and wet.
- Maggie. Och, that don't matter, Kirsteen! (She smiles at her broken-heartedly, then turns to Mary.) Sure, she's been tryin' to

take care of me from the time she could toddle. (She goes out.)

Kirsteen (after the door has closed).—Aw, it's hard, hard to make your own mother suffer like that! (With difficulty she restrains herself from weeping.) But oh, I can't help it! There's something callin' me to go. I'm like a bird when the flyin' time comes—I've got to fly. Ye know how it is, Auntie?

Mary. — Yes, I know.

KIRSTEEN. — But it's cruel hard.

Mary. — It's awful hard for you — and me, too.

KIRSTEEN (going to her). — Yes, it'll not be easy for you.

Mary. — She'll always blame me.

KIRSTEEN. - She'll blame Johnny Moore.

Mary. — Ah, but we'll be alone together in this wee house.

KIRSTEEN. — I think I'll go after her. It's quare and lonely on the street for her at this hour.

(MARY does not answer immediately. She has gone to the window and is looking out into the night.)

Mary (without turning round). - It's terrible

- THE RETURN OF THE EMIGRANT 109 dark out there. You'd better go after her, Kirsteen.
- KIRSTEEN. It's a rare comfort to me that she'll have you beside her when I am gone. (She goes out.)
- (Left alone, MARY turns and looks almost fearfully about the room.)
- MARY.—Oh, the darkness—the quiet—the ceiling pressing down...Oh— (She throws out her arms in a tragic gesture.)

 I wish it was me that was going out, to the great new land—a little immigrant girl...I wish it was me!

CURTAIN





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